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Introduction

CAIUS PLINIUS Cæcilius Secundus commonly known as the younger Pliny, one of the most elegant writers of his day, was born at Novum-Comum (Como) A. D. 62. Having lost his father, Lucius Cæcilius, when quite a child, he was adopted by his uncle, Caius Plinius Secundus, the elder Pliny, author of the "Natural History," a man of sterling principle, extensive information, and almost incredible industry as a writer, judging from his nephew's account of him in a letter to his friend Bæbius Macer. The younger Pliny seems to have been most carefully brought up; Verginius Rufus was his guardian, and he attended the oratorical classes of Quintilian and Nicetes Sacerdos. He began life as a pleader at the Roman bar, in his eighteenth year: it was in the same year that he lost

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dealing with times and scenes so remote was ever more widely popular, and in aiming at popularity the author laboured hard to secure historical accuracy. Bulwer states in his note to the *Destruction of Pompeii*:

“ Various theories as to the exact mode by which Pompeii was destroyed have been invented by the ingenious; I have adopted that which is the most generally received, and which, upon inspecting the strata, appears the only one admissible by common sense; namely, a destruction by showers of ashes, and boiling water, mingled with frequent irruptions of large stones, and aided by the partial convulsions of the earth. Herculaneum, on the contrary, appears to have received not only the showers of ashes, but also inundations from molten lava; and the streams referred to in the text must be considered as destined for that city rather than for Pompeii. The volcanic lightnings introduced in my description were evidently among the engines of ruin at Pompeii.

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Papyrus, and other of the more inflammable materials, are found in a burned state. Some substances in metal are partially melted; and a bronze statue is completely shivered, as by lightning. Upon the whole (excepting only the inevitable poetic license of shortening the time which the destruction occupied), I believe my description of that awful event is very little assisted by invention, and will be found none the less accurate for its appearance in a Romance."

In offering this selection, the desire is not only to give the reader an opportunity to compare the graphic descriptions of Pliny, an eye-witness, with the brilliant and fascinating romance of the versatile and inventive Bulwer, but also to cite examples of composition, which, for excellence in the art of sustaining thrilling interest, breadth and variety of portraiture, have withstood all criticism, and are to-day unequalled in the annals of Literature.

The Destruction of Pompeii
as given by
Caius Plinius Cæcilius Secundus
in Two Letters to Cornelius Tacitus

The Destruction of Pompeii

I.

PLINY'S LETTER TO CORNELIUS
TACITUS

YOUR request that I would send you an account of my uncle's death, in order to transmit a more exact relation of it to posterity, deserves my acknowledgments ; for, if this accident shall be celebrated by your pen, the glory of it, I well am assured, will be rendered for ever illustrious. And notwithstanding he perished by a misfortune which, as it involved at the same

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time a most beautiful country in ruins, and destroyed so many populous cities, seems to promise him an everlasting remembrance ; notwithstanding he has himself composed many and lasting works ; yet I am persuaded the mentioning of him in your immortal writings will greatly contribute to render his name immortal. Happy I esteem those to be to whom by provision of the gods has been granted the ability either to do such actions as are worthy of being related or to relate them in a manner worthy of being read ; but peculiarly happy are they who are blessed with both these uncommon talents : in the number of which my uncle, as his own writings and your history will evidently prove, may justly be ranked. It is with extreme will-

ingness, therefore, that I execute your commands ; and should indeed have claimed the task if you had not enjoined it. He was at that time with the fleet under his command at Misenum.¹ On the 24th of August, about one in the afternoon, my mother desired him to observe a cloud which appeared of a very unusual size and shape. He had just taken a turn in the sun,² and, after bathing himself

¹ In the Bay of Naples.

² The Romans used to lie or walk naked in the sun, after anointing their bodies with oil, which was esteemed as greatly contributing to health, and therefore daily practised by them. This custom, however, of anointing themselves is inveighed against by the satirists as in the number of their luxurious indulgences ; but since we find the elder Pliny here, and the amiable Spurinna in a former letter, practising this method, we cannot suppose the thing itself

in cold water, and making a light luncheon, gone back to his books: he immediately arose and went out upon a rising ground from whence he might get a better sight of this very uncommon appearance. A cloud, from which mountain was uncertain, at this distance (but it was found afterward to come from Mount Vesuvius),² was

was esteemed unmanly, but only when it was attended with some particular circumstances of an over-refined delicacy.

² About six miles distant from Naples.—This dreadful eruption happened A. D. 79, in the first year of the Emperor Titus. Martial has a pretty epigram upon this subject, in which he gives us a view of Vesuvius, as it appeared before this terrible conflagration broke out:

“ *Hic est pampineis viridis modo Vesuvius umbris,
Presserat hic madidos nobilis uva lacus.
Hæc juga, quam Nisæ colles, plus Bacchus amavit;
Hoc nuper Satyri monte dedere choros.* ”

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ascending, the appearance of which I cannot give you a more exact description of than by likening it to

Hæc Veneris sedes, Lacedæmone gratior illi ;

Hic locus Herculeo nomine clarus erat :

Cuncta jacent flammis, et tristi mersa favilla ;

Nec vellent superi hoc licuisse sibi."

— Lib. iv. ep. xliv.

TRANSLATION

" *Here* verdant vines o'erspread Vesuvio's sides ;
The gen'rous grape *here* pour'd her purple tides.
This Bacchus lov'd beyond his native scene ;
Here dancing satyrs joy'd to trip the green.
Far more than Sparta *this* in Venus' grace ;
And great Alcides once renown'd the place :
Now flaming-embers spread dire waste around,
And gods regret that gods can thus confound."

It seems probable that this was the first eruption of Mount Vesuvius, at least of any consequence ; as it is certain we have no particular accounts of any preceding one. Dio, indeed, and other ancient authors speak of it as burning before ; but still they describe it as covered with trees and vines, so that the eruptions must have been inconsiderable.

that of a pine-tree, for it shot up to a great height in the form of a very tall trunk, which spread itself out at the top into a sort of branches; occasioned, I imagine, either by a sudden gust of air that impelled it, the force of which decreased as it advanced upwards, or the cloud itself being pressed back again by its own weight, expanded in the manner I have mentioned; it appeared sometimes bright and sometimes dark and spotted, according as it was either more or less impregnated with earth and cinders. This phenomenon seemed to a man of such learning and research as my uncle extraordinary and worth further looking into. He ordered a light vessel to be got ready, and gave me leave, if I liked, to accompany him. I said I

had rather go on with my work ; and it so happened he had himself given me something to write out. As he was coming out of the house,¹ he received a note from Rectina, the wife of Bassus, who was in the utmost alarm at the imminent danger which threatened her ; for her villa lying at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, there was no way of escape but by sea ; she earnestly entreated him therefore to come to her assistance. He accordingly changed his first intention, and what he had begun from a philosophi-

¹ The manuscript and printed copies vary extremely from each other as to the reading of this passage. The conjecture of Gesner seems the most satisfactory, as it comes nearest the most approved manuscripts, and best falls in with the context ; it is, therefore, adopted in the translation.

cal, he now carries out in a noble and generous spirit. He ordered the galleys to put to sea, and went himself on board with an intention of assisting not only Rectina, but the several other towns which lay thickly strewn along that beautiful coast. Hastening then to the place from whence others fled with the utmost terror, he steered his course direct to the point of danger, and with so much calmness and presence of mind as to be able to make and dictate his observations upon the motion and all the phenomena of that dreadful scene. He was now so close to the mountain that the cinders, which grew thicker and hotter the nearer he approached, fell into the ships, together with pumice-stones, and black pieces of burning rock: they were in danger

too, not only of being aground by the sudden retreat of the sea, but also from the vast fragments which rolled down from the mountain, and obstructed all the shore. Here he stopped to consider whether he should turn back again; to which the pilot advising him, “Fortune,” said he, “favours the brave; steer to where Pomponianus is.” Pomponianus was then at *Stabiæ*,¹ separated by a bay, which the sea, after several insensible windings, forms with the shore. He had already sent his baggage on board; for though he was not at that time in actual danger, yet being within sight of it, and indeed extremely near, if it should in the least increase, he was determined to put to

¹ Now called *Castelamare*, in the Bay of Naples.

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sea as soon as the wind, which was blowing dead inshore, should go down. It was favourable, however, for carrying my uncle to Pomponianus, whom he found in the greatest consternation : he embraced him tenderly, encouraging and urging him to keep up his spirits, and, the more effectually to soothe his fears by seeming unconcerned himself, ordered a bath to be got ready, and then, after having bathed, sat down to supper with great cheerfulness, or at least (what is just as heroic) with every appearance of it. Meanwhile broad flames shone out in several places from Mount Vesuvius, which the darkness of the night contributed to render still brighter and clearer. But my uncle, in order to soothe the apprehensions of his friend, assured

him it was only the burning of the villages, which the country people had abandoned to the flames: after this he retired to rest, and it is most certain he was so little disquieted as to fall into a sound sleep; for his breathing, which, on account of his corpulence, was rather heavy and sonorous, was heard by the attendants outside. The court which led to his apartment being now almost filled with stones and ashes, if he had continued there any time longer it would have been impossible for him to have made his way out. So he was awoke and got up, and went to Pomponianus and the rest of his company, who were feeling too anxious to think of going to bed. They consulted together whether it would be most prudent to trust to the

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houses, which now rocked from side to side with frequent and violent concussions as though shaken from their very foundations ; or fly to the open fields, where the calcined stones and cinders, though light indeed, yet fell in large showers, and threatened destruction. In this choice of dangers they resolved for the fields : a resolution which, while the rest of the company were hurried into by their fears, my uncle embraced upon cool and deliberate consideration. They went out then, having pillows tied upon their heads with napkins ; and this was their whole defence against the storm of stones that fell around them. It was now day everywhere else, but *there* a deeper darkness prevailed than in the thickest night ; which however

was in some degree alleviated by torches and other lights of various kinds. They thought proper to go farther down upon the shore to see if they might safely put out to sea, but found the waves still running extremely high, and boisterous. There my uncle, laying himself down upon a sail-cloth, which was spread for him, called twice for some cold water, which he drank, when immediately the flames, preceded by a strong whiff of sulphur, dispersed the rest of the party and obliged him to rise. He raised himself up with the assistance of two of his servants, and instantly fell down dead; suffocated, as I conjecture, by some gross and noxious vapour, having always had a weak throat, which was often in-

flamed. As soon as it was light again, which was not till the third day after this melancholy accident, his body was found entire, and without any marks of violence upon it, in the dress in which he fell, and looking more like a man asleep than dead. During all this time my mother and I, who were at Misenum — but this has no connection with your history, and you did not desire any particulars besides those of my uncle's death; so I will end here, only adding that I have faithfully related to you what I was either an eye-witness of myself or received immediately after the accident happened, and before there was time to vary the truth. You will pick out of this narrative whatever is most important: for a letter is one thing, a

history another; it is one thing writing to friend, another thing writing to the public. Farewell.

II.

PLINY'S LETTER TO CORNELIUS TACITUS

The letter which, in compliance with your request, I wrote to you concerning the death of my uncle has raised, it seems, your curiosity to know what terrors and dangers attended me while I continued at Misenum; for there, I think, my account broke off:

“Though my shock'd soul recoils, my tongue shall tell.”¹

My uncle having left us, I spent such

¹ Virg. Pitt's translation.

time as was left on my studies (it was on their account indeed that I had stopped behind), till it was time for my bath. After which I went to supper, and then fell into a short and uneasy sleep. There had been noticed for many days before a trembling of the earth, which did not alarm us much, as this is quite an ordinary occurrence in Campania; but it was so particularly violent that night that it not only shook but actually overturned, as it would seem, everything about us. My mother rushed into my chamber, where she found me rising, in order to awaken her. We sat down in the open court of the house, which occupied a small space between the buildings and the sea. As I was at that time but eighteen years of age, I

know not whether I should call my behaviour, in this dangerous juncture, courage or folly ; but I took up Livy, and amused myself with turning over that author, and even making extracts from him, as if I had been perfectly at my leisure. Just then, a friend of my uncle's, who had lately come to him from Spain, joined us, and observing me sitting by my mother with a book in my hand, reproved her for her calmness, and me at the same time for my careless security ; nevertheless I went on with my author. Though it was now morning, the light was still exceedingly faint and doubtful ; the buildings all around us tottered, and though we stood upon open ground, yet, as the place was narrow and confined, there was no remaining without

imminent danger: we therefore resolved to quit the town. A panic-stricken crowd followed us, and (as to a mind distracted with terror every suggestion seems more prudent than its own) pressed on us in dense array to drive us forward as we came out. Being at a convenient distance from the houses, we stood still, in the midst of a most dangerous and dreadful scene. The chariots, which we had ordered to be drawn out, were so agitated backwards and forwards, though upon the most level ground, that we could not keep them steady, even by supporting them with large stones. The sea seemed to roll back upon itself, and to be driven from its banks by the convulsive motion of the earth; it is certain at least the shore was consid-

erably enlarged, and several sea animals were left upon it. On the other side, a black and dreadful cloud, broken with rapid, zigzag flashes, revealed behind it variously shaped masses of flame: these last were like sheet-lightning, but much larger. Upon this our Spanish friend, whom I mentioned above, addressing himself to my mother and me with great energy and urgency: “If your brother,” he said, “if your uncle be safe, he certainly wishes you may be so too; but if he perished, it was his desire, no doubt, that you might both survive him; why therefore do you delay your escape a moment?” We could never think of our own safety, we said, while we were uncertain of his. Upon this our friend left us, and withdrew from the

danger with the utmost precipitation. Soon afterward, the cloud began to descend, and cover the sea. It had already surrounded and concealed the island of Capreæ¹ and the promontory of Misenum. My mother now besought, urged, even commanded me to make my escape at any rate, which, as I was young, I might easily do; as for herself, she said, her age and corpulency rendered all attempts of that sort impossible; however, she would willingly meet death if she could have the satisfaction of seeing that she was not the occasion of mine. But I absolutely refused to leave her, and, taking her by the hand, compelled her to go with me. She complied with great reluctance, and not without many re-

¹ An island near Naples, now called Capri.

proaches to herself for retarding my flight. The ashes now began to fall upon us, though in no great quantity. I looked back; a dense dark mist seemed to be following us, spreading itself over the country like a cloud. "Let us turn out of the high-road," I said, "while we can still see, for fear that, should we fall in the road, we should be pressed to death in the dark, by the crowds that are following us." We had scarcely sat down when night came upon us, not such as we have when the sky is cloudy, or when there is no moon, but that of a room when it is shut up, and all the lights put out. You might hear the shrieks of women, the screams of children, and the shouts of men; some calling for their children, others for their parents, others

for their husbands, and seeking to recognise each other by the voices that replied; one lamenting his own fate, another that of his family; some wishing to die, from the very fear of dying; some lifting their hands to the gods; but the greater part convinced that there were now no gods at all, and that the final endless night of which we have heard had come upon the world.¹ Among these there were some who augmented the real terrors by others imaginary or wilfully invented. I remember some who declared that one part of Misenum had fallen, that

¹ The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers held that the world was to be destroyed by fire, and all things fall again into original chaos; not excepting even the national gods themselves from the destruction of this general conflagration.

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another was on fire ; it was false, but they found people to believe them. It now grew rather lighter, which we imagined to be rather the forerunner of an approaching burst of flames (as in truth it was) than the return of day ; however, the fire fell at a distance from us ; then again we were immersed in thick darkness, and a heavy shower of ashes rained upon us, which we were obliged every now and then to stand up to shake off, otherwise we should have been crushed and buried in the heap. I might boast that, during all this scene of horror, not a sigh, or expression of fear, escaped me, had not my support been grounded in that miserable, though mighty, consolation, that all mankind were involved in the same calamity, and that I was perish-

ing with the world itself. At last this dreadful darkness was dissipated by degrees, like a cloud or smoke ; the real day returned, and even the sun shone out, though with a lurid light, like when an eclipse is coming on. Every object that presented itself to our eyes (which were extremely weakened) seemed changed, being covered deep with ashes as if with snow. We returned to Misenum, where we refreshed ourselves as well as we could, and passed an anxious night between hope and fear ; though, indeed, with a much larger share of the latter : for the earthquake still continued, while many frenzied persons ran up and down heightening their own and their friends' calamities by terrible predictions. However, my mother and I, notwithstanding

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ing the danger we had passed, and that which still threatened us, had no thoughts of leaving the place till we could receive some news of my uncle.

And now, you will read this narrative without any view of inserting it in your history, of which it is not in the least worthy ; and indeed you must put it down to your own request if it should appear not worth even the trouble of a letter. Farewell.

The Destruction of Pompeii

By Bulwer - Lytton

The Destruction of Pompeii

I.

THE awful night preceding the fierce joy of the amphitheatre rolled drearily away, and grayly broke forth the dawn of THE LAST DAY OF POMPEII! The air was uncommonly calm and sultry,—a thin and dull mist gathered over the valleys and hollows of the broad Campanian fields. But yet it was remarked in surprise by the early fishermen, that, despite the exceeding stillness of the atmosphere, the waves of the sea were agitated,

and seemed, as it were, to run disturbedly back from the shore; while along the blue and stately Sarnus, whose ancient breadth of channel the traveller now vainly seeks to discover, there crept a hoarse and sullen murmur, as it glided by the laughing plains and the gaudy villas of the wealthy citizens. Clear above the low mist rose the time-worn towers of the immemorial town, the red-tiled roofs of the bright streets, the solemn columns of many temples, and the statue-crowned portals of the Forum and the Arch of Triumph. Far in the distance, the outline of the circling hills soared above the vapours, and mingled with the changeful hues of the morning sky. The cloud that had so long rested over the crest of Vesuvius had sud-

denly vanished, and its rugged and haughty brow looked without a frown over the beautiful scenes below.

Despite the earliness of the hour, the gates of the city were already opened. Horseman upon horseman, vehicle after vehicle, poured rapidly in ; and the voices of numerous pedestrian groups, clad in holiday attire, rose high in joyous and excited merriment ; the streets were crowded with citizens and strangers from the populous neighbourhood of Pompeii ; and noisily — fast — confusedly swept the many streams of life toward the fatal show.

Despite the vast size of the amphitheatre, seemingly so disproportioned to the extent of the city, and formed to include nearly the whole population of Pompeii itself, so great, on extraor-

dinary occasions, was the concourse of strangers from all parts of Campania, that the space before it was usually crowded for several hours previous to the commencement of the sports, by such persons as were not entitled by their rank to appointed and especial seats. And the intense curiosity, which the trial and sentence of two criminals so remarkable had occasioned, increased the crowd on this day to an extent wholly unprecedented.

While the common people, with the lively vehemence of their Campanian blood, were thus pushing, scrambling, hurrying on,—yet, amid all their eagerness, preserving, as is now the wont with Italians in such meetings, a wonderful order and unquarrelsome good humour,—a strange visitor to

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Arbaces, the Egyptian High Priest, was threading her way to his sequestered mansion. At the sight of her quaint and primeval garb — of her wild gait and gestures — the passengers she encountered touched each other and smiled ; but as they caught a glimpse of her countenance, the mirth was hushed at once, for the face was as the face of the dead ; and, what with the ghastly features and obsolete robes of the stranger, it seemed as if one long entombed had risen once more among the living. In silence and awe each group gave way as she passed along, and she soon gained the broad porch of the palace of the priests of Isis.

The black porter, like the rest of the world, astir at an unusual hour, started as he opened the door to her summons.

The sleep of the Egyptian priest had been unusually profound during the night ; but as the dawn approached, it was disturbed by strange and unquiet dreams, which impressed him the more as they were coloured by the peculiar philosophy he embraced.

He thought that he was transported to the bowels of the earth, and that he stood alone in a mighty cavern, supported by enormous columns of rough and primeval rock, lost, as they ascended, in the vastness of a shadow athwart whose eternal darkness no beam of day had ever glanced. And in the space between these columns were huge wheels, that whirled round and round unceasingly, and with a rushing and roaring noise. Only to the right and left extremities of the cavern, the space

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between the pillars was left bare, and the apertures stretched away into galleries — not wholly dark, but dimly lighted by wandering and erratic fires, that, meteor-like, now crept (as the snake creeps) along the rugged and dark soil ; and now leaped fiercely to and fro, darting across the vast gloom in wild gambols — suddenly disappearing, and as suddenly bursting into ten-fold brilliancy and power. And while he gazed wonderingly upon the gallery to the left, thin, mist-like, aërial shapes passed slowly up ; and when they had gained the hall they seemed to rise aloft, and to vanish, as the smoke vanishes, in the measureless ascent.

He turned in fear toward the opposite extremity — and behold ! there came swiftly, from the gloom above,

similar shadows, which swept hurriedly along the gallery to the right, as if borne involuntarily adown the tides of some invisible stream; and the faces of these spectres were more distinct than those that emerged from the opposite passage; and on some was joy, and on others sorrow—some were vivid with expectation and hope, some unutterably dejected by awe and horror. And so they passed swift and constantly on, till the eyes of the gazer grew dizzy and blinded with the whirl of an ever-varying succession of things impelled by a power apparently not their own.

Arbaces turned away; and in the recess of the hall he saw the mighty form of a giantess seated upon a pile of skulls, and her hands were busy upon a pale and shadowy woof; and

he saw that the woof communicated with the numberless wheels, as if it guided the machinery of their movements. He thought his feet, by some secret agency, were impelled toward the female, and that he was borne onward till he stood before her, face to face. The countenance of the giantess was solemn and hushed, and beautifully serene. It was as the face of some colossal sculpture of his own ancestral sphinx. No passion, no human emotion, disturbed its brooding and unwrinkled brow; there was neither sadness, nor joy, nor memory, nor hope; it was free from all with which the wild human heart can sympathise. The mystery of mysteries rested on its beauty,—it awed, but terrified not; it was the Incarnation

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of the Sublime. But Arbaces felt the voice leave his lips, without an impulse of his own; and the voice asked:

“Who art thou, and what is thy task?”

“I am That which thou hast acknowledged,” answered, without desisting from its work, the mighty phantom. “My name is NATURE! These are the wheels of the world, and my hand guides them for the life of all things.”

“And what,” said the voice of Arbaces, “are these galleries, that, strangely and fitfully illumined, stretch on either hand into the abyss of gloom?”

“That,” answered the giant-mother, “which thou beholdest to the left, is the gallery of the Unborn. The

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shadows that flit onward and upward into the world are the souls that pass from the long eternity of being to their destined pilgrimage on earth. That which thou beholdest to thy right, wherein the shadows descending from above sweep on, equally unknown and dim, is the gallery of the Dead ! ”

“ And, wherefore,” said the voice of Arbaces, “ yon wandering lights, that so wildly break the darkness ; but only *break*, not *reveal*? ”

“ Dark fool of the human sciences ! dreamer of the stars, and would-be decipherer of the heart and origin of things ! those lights are but the glimmerings of such knowledge as is vouchsafed to Nature to work her way, to trace enough of the past and future to give providence to her designs. Judge,

then, puppet as thou art, what lights are reserved for thee ! ”

Arbaces felt himself tremble as he asked again, “ Wherefore am I here ? ”

“ It is the forecast of thy soul — the prescience of thy rushing doom — the shadow of thy fate lengthening into eternity as it declines from earth.”

Ere he could answer, Arbaces felt a rushing WIND sweep down the cavern, as the winds of a giant god. Borne aloft from the ground, and whirled on high as a leaf in the storms of autumn, he beheld himself in the midst of the Spectres of the Dead, and hurrying with them along the length of gloom. As in vain and impotent despair he struggled against the impelling power, he thought the

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WIND grew into something like a shape — a spectral outline of the wings and talons of an eagle, with limbs floating far and indistinctly along the air, and eyes that, alone clearly and vividly seen, glared stonily and remorselessly on his own.

“What art thou?” again said the voice of the Egyptian.

“I am That which thou hast acknowledged;” and the spectre laughed aloud — “and my name is NECESSITY.”

“To what dost thou bear me?”

“To the Unknown.”

“To happiness or to woe?”

“As thou hast sown, so shalt thou reap.”

“Dread thing, not so! If thou art the Ruler of life, *thine* are my misdeeds, not mine.”

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“I am but the breath of God!”
answered the mighty WIND.

“Then is my wisdom vain!”
groaned the dreamer.

“The husbandman accuses not fate,
when, having sown thistles, he reaps
not corn. Thou hast sown crime,
accuse not fate if thou reapest not
the harvest of virtue.”

The scene suddenly changed. Arbaces was in a place of human bones; and lo! in the midst of them was a skull, and the skull, still retaining its fleshless hollows, assumed slowly, and in the mysterious confusion of a dream, the face of Death; and forth from the grinning jaws there crept a small worm, and it crawled to the feet of Arbaces. He attempted to stamp on it and crush it; but it became longer and larger

with that attempt. It swelled and bloated until it grew into a vast serpent ; it coiled itself around the limbs of Arbaces ; it crunched his bones ; it raised its glaring eyes and poisonous jaws to his face. He writhed in vain ; he withered — he gasped — beneath the influence of the blighting breath — he felt himself blasted unto death. And then a voice came from the reptile, which still bore the face of Death, and rang in his reeling ear :

“ THY RELIGION IS THY JUDGE !
NATURE THOU WOULDST RULE BECOMES
THE SERPENT THAT DEVOURS THEE ! ”

With a shriek of wrath, and woe, and despairing resistance, Arbaces awoke — his hair on end — his brow bathed in dew — his eyes glazed and staring — his mighty frame quivering

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as an infant's beneath the agony of that dream. He awoke — he collected himself — he blessed the gods whom he disbelieved, that he *was* in a dream ; he turned his eyes from side to side — he saw the dawning light break through his small but lofty window — he was in the Precincts of Day — he rejoiced — he smiled ; his eyes fell, and opposite to him he beheld the ghastly features, the lifeless eye, the livid lip — of the Hag of Vesuvius !

“ Ha ! ” he cried, placing his hands before his eyes, as to shut out the grisly vision, “ do I dream still ? Am I with the dead ? ”

“ Mighty Hermes — no ! Thou art with one death - like, but not dead. Recognise thy friend and slave.”

There was a long silence. Slowly

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the shudders that passed over the limbs of the Egyptian chased each other away, faintlier and faintlier dying till he was himself again.

“It was a dream, then,” said he. “Well — let me dream no more, or the day can not compensate for the pangs of night. Woman, how camest thou here, and wherefore ?”

“I came to warn thee,” answered the sepulchral voice of the saga.

“Warn me ! The dream lied not, then ? Of what peril ?”

“Listen to me. Some evil hangs over this fated city. Fly while it be time. Thou knowest that I hold my home on that mountain beneath which old tradition saith there yet burn the fires of the river of Phlegethon ; and in my cavern is a vast abyss, and in

that abyss I have of late marked a red and dull stream creep slowly, slowly on ; and heard many and mighty sounds hissing and roaring through the gloom. But last night, as I looked thereon, behold the stream was no longer dull, but intensely and fiercely luminous ; and while I gazed, the beast that liveth with me, and was cowering by my side, uttered a shrill howl, and fell down and died,¹ and the slaver and froth were around his lips. I crept back to my lair ; but I distinctly heard, all the night, the rock shake and tremble ; and, though the air was heavy and still, there were the hissing of pent winds, and the

¹ We may suppose that the exhalations were similar in effect to those of the Grotto del Cane.

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grinding as of wheels, beneath the ground. So, when I rose this morning at the very birth of dawn, I looked again down the abyss, and I saw vast fragments of stone borne black and floatingly over the lurid stream; and the stream itself was broader, fiercer, redder than the night before. Then I went forth, and ascended to the summit of the rock; and in that summit there appeared a sudden and vast hollow, which I had never perceived before, from which curled a dim, faint smoke; and the vapour was deathly, and I gasped, and sickened, and nearly died. I returned home, I took my gold and my drugs, and left the habitation of many years; for I remembered the dark Etruscan prophecy which saith, 'When the mountain opens, the

city shall fall — when the smoke crowns the Hill of the Parched Fields, there shall be woe and weeping in the hearths of the Children of the Sea.' Dread master, ere I leave these walls for some more distant dwelling, I come to thee. As thou livest, know I in my heart that the earthquake that sixteen years ago shook this city to its solid base was but the forerunner of more deadly doom. The walls of Pompeii are built above the fields of the Dead, and the rivers of the sleepless Hell. Be warned and fly!"

"Witch, I thank thee for thy care of one not ungrateful. On yon table stands a cup of gold; take it, it is thine. I dreamed not that there lived one, out of the priesthood of Isis, who

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would have saved Arbaces from destruction. The signs thou hast seen in the bed of the extinct volcano," continued the Egyptian, musingly, "surely tell of some coming danger to the city ; perhaps another earthquake fiercer than the last. Be that as it may, there is a new reason for my hastening from these walls. After this day I will prepare my departure. Daughter of Etruria, whither wendest thou ? "

" I shall cross over to Herculaneum this day, and, wandering thence along the coast, shall seek out a new home. I am friendless ; my two companions, the fox and the snake, are dead. Great Hermes, thou hast promised me twenty additional years of life ! "

" Ay," said the Egyptian, " I have promised thee. But, woman," he

added, lifting himself upon his arm, and gazing curiously on her face, “tell me, I pray thee, wherefore thou wishest to live? What sweets dost thou discover in existence?”

“It is not life that is sweet, but death that is awful,” replied the hag, in a sharp, impressive tone, that struck forcibly upon the heart of the vain star-seer. He winced at the truth of the reply; and, no longer anxious to retain so uninviting a companion, he said, “Time wanes; I must prepare for the solemn spectacle of this day. Sister, farewell! enjoy thyself as thou canst over the ashes of life.”

The hag, who had placed the costly gift of Arbaces in the loose folds of her vest, now rose to depart. When she had gained the door she paused,

turned back, and said, “This may be the last time we meet on earth; but whither flyeth the flame when it leaves the ashes? Wandering to and fro, up and down, as an exhalation on the morass, the flame may be seen in the marshes of the lake below; and the witch and the Magian, the pupil and the master, the great one and the accursed one, may meet again. Farewell!”

“Out, croaker!” muttered Arbaces, as the door closed on the hag’s tattered robes; and, impatient of his own thoughts, not yet recovered from the past dream, he hastily summoned his slaves.

It was the custom to attend the ceremonials of the amphitheatre in festive robes, and Arbaces arrayed

himself that day with more than usual care. His tunic was of the most dazzling white; his many fibulæ were formed from the most precious stones: over his tunic flowed a loose Eastern robe, half-gown, half-mantle, glowing in the richest hues of the Tyrian dye; and the sandals, that reached half-way up the knee, were studded with gems, and inlaid with gold.

It was customary for men of rank to be accompanied to the shows of the amphitheatre by a procession of their slaves and freedmen; and the long “family” of Arbaces were already arranged in order, to attend the litter of their lord.

“Callias,” said Arbaces, apart to his freedman, who was buckling on his

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girdle, “I am weary of Pompeii; I propose to quit it in three days, should the wind favour. Thou knowest the vessel that lies in the harbour which belonged to Narses, of Alexandria; I have purchased it of him. The day after to-morrow we shall begin to remove my stores.”

“So soon! ’Tis well. Arbaces shall be obeyed—and his ward, Ione?”

“Accompanies me. Enough!—Is the morning fair?”

“Dim and oppressive; it will probably be intensely hot in the forenoon.”

“The poor gladiators, and more wretched criminals! Descend, and see that the slaves are marshalled.”

Left alone, Arbaces stepped into his chamber of study, and thence upon the

portico without. He saw the dense masses of men pouring fast into the amphitheatre, and heard the cry of the assistants, and the cracking of the cordage, as they were straining aloft the huge awning under which the citizens, molested by no discomforting ray, were to behold, at luxurious ease, the agonies of their fellow creatures. Suddenly a wild strange sound went forth, and as suddenly died away — it was the roar of the lion. There was a silence in the distant crowd ; but the silence was followed by joyous laughter — they were making merry at the hungry impatience of the royal beast.

“ Brutes ! ” muttered the disdainful Arbaces, “ are ye less homicides than I am ? *I* slay but in self-defence — *ye* make murder pastime.”

He turned with a restless and curious eye toward Vesuvius. Beautifully glowed the green vineyards around its breast, and tranquil as eternity lay in the breathless skies the form of the mighty hill.

“We have time yet, if the earthquake be nursing,” thought Arbaces; and he turned from the spot. He passed by the table which bore his mystic scrolls and Chaldean calculations.

“August art !” he thought, “I have not consulted thy decrees since I passed the danger and the crisis they foretold. What matter ? — I know that *henceforth* all in my path is bright and smooth. Have not events already proved it ? Away, doubt — away, pity ! Reflect, O my heart — reflect, for the future

but two images — Empire and Greatness.”

II.

THE procession of Arbaces moved along slowly, and with much solemnity, till now, arriving at the place where it was necessary for such as came in litters or chariots to alight, Arbaces descended from his vehicle, and proceeded to the entrance by which the more distinguished spectators were admitted. His slaves, mingling with the humbler crowd, were stationed by officers who received their tickets (not much unlike our modern opera ones), in places in the *popularia* (the seats apportioned to the vulgar). And now, from the spot where Arbaces sat, his eyes scanned the mighty and

impatient crowd that filled the stupendous theatre.

On the upper tier (but apart from the male spectators) sat the women, their gay dresses resembling some gaudy flower-bed ; it is needless to add that they were the most talkative part of the assembly ; and many were the looks directed up to them, especially from the benches appropriated to the young and the unmarried men. On the lower seats around the arena sat the more high-born and wealthy visitors — the magistrates and those of senatorial or equestrian¹ dignity : the passages which, by corridors at the right and left, gave access to these seats, at either end of the oval arena,

¹ The equites sat immediately behind the senators.

were also the entrances for the combatants. Strong palings at these passages prevented any unwelcome eccentricity in the movements of the beasts, and confined them to their appointed prey. Around the parapet which was raised above the arena, and from which the seats gradually rose, were gladiatorial inscriptions, and paintings wrought in fresco, typical of the entertainments for which the place was designed. Throughout the whole building wound invisible pipes, from which, as the day advanced, cooling and fragrant showers were to be sprinkled over the spectators. The officers of the amphitheatre were still employed in the task of fixing the vast awning (or *velaria*) which covered the whole, and which luxurious

invention the Campanians arrogated to themselves: it was woven of the whitest Apulian wool, and variegated with broad stripes of crimson. Owing either to some inexperience on the part of the workmen, or to some defect in the machinery, the awning, however, was not arranged that day so happily as usual; indeed, from the immense space of the circumference, the task was always one of great difficulty and art — so much so, that it could seldom be adventured in rough or windy weather. But the present day was so remarkably still, that there seemed to the spectators no excuse for the awkwardness of the artificers; and when a large gap in the back of the awning was still visible, from the obstinate refusal of one part of the

velaria to ally itself with the rest, the murmurs of discontent were loud and general.

The ædile Pansa, at whose expense the exhibition was given, looked particularly annoyed at the defect, and vowed bitter vengeance on the head of the chief officer of the show, who fretting, puffing, perspiring, busied himself in idle orders and unavailing threats.

The hubbub ceased suddenly — the operators desisted — the crowd were stilled — the gap was forgotten — for now, with a loud and warlike flourish of trumpets, the gladiators, marshalled in ceremonious procession, entered the arena. They swept around the oval space very slowly and deliberately, in order to give the spectators full leisure

to admire their stern serenity of feature — their brawny limbs and various arms, as well as to form such wagers as the excitement of the moment might suggest.

“ Oh ! ” cried the widow Fulvia to the wife of Pansa, as they leaned down from their lofty bench, “ do you see that gigantic gladiator ? how drolly he is dressed ! ”

“ Yes,” said the ædile’s wife, with complacent importance, for she knew all the names and qualities of each combatant ; “ he is a retiarius, or netter ; he is armed only, you see, with a three-pronged spear like a trident, and a net ; he wears no armour, only the fillet and the tunic. He is a mighty man, and is to fight with Sporus, yon thick-set gladiator, with

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the round shield and drawn sword, but without body armour ; he has not his helmet on now, in order that you may see his face, — how fearless it is ! — by and by he will fight with his visor down.”

“ But surely a net and a spear are poor arms against a shield and sword ? ”

“ That shows how innocent you are, my dear Fulvia ; the retiarius has generally the best of it.”

“ But who is yon handsome gladiator, nearly naked — is it not quite improper ? By Venus ! but his limbs are beautifully shaped ! ”

“ It is Lydon, a young untried man ! he has the rashness to fight yon other gladiator similarly dressed, or rather undressed — Tetraides. They fight first in the Greek fashion with the

cestus ; afterward they put on armour, and try sword and shield.”

“ He is a proper man, this Lydon ; and the women, I am sure, are on his side.”

“ So are not the experienced betters ; Clodius offers three to one against him.”

“ Oh, Jove ! how beautiful ! ” exclaimed the widow, as two gladiators, armed *cap-á-pié*, rode around the arena on light and prancing steeds. Resembling much the combatants in the tilts of the middle age, they bore lances and round shields beautifully inlaid : their armour was woven intricately with bands of iron, but it covered only the thighs and the right arms ; short cloaks, extending to the seat, gave a picturesque and graceful air to their costume ; their legs were naked with

the exception of sandals, which were fastened a little above the ankle. “Oh, beautiful! Who are these?” asked the widow.

“The one is named Berbix — he has conquered twelve times; the other assumes the arrogant name of Nobilior. They are both Gauls.”

While thus conversing, the first formalities of the show were over. To these succeeded a feigned combat with wooden swords between the various gladiators matched against each other. Among these, the skill of two Roman gladiators, hired for the occasion, was the most admired; and next to them the most graceful combatant was Lydon. This sham contest did not last above an hour, nor did it attract any very lively interest, except among those connois-

seurs of the arena to whom art was preferable to more coarse excitement ; the body of the spectators were rejoiced when it was over ; and when the sympathy rose to terror. The combatants were now arranged in pairs, as agreed beforehand ; their weapons examined ; and the grave sports of the day commenced amid the deepest silence — broken only by an exciting and preliminary blast of warlike music.

It was often customary to begin the sports by the most cruel of all, and some bestiarius, or gladiator appointed to the beasts, was slain first, as an initiatory sacrifice. But in the present instance, the experienced Pansa thought it better that the sanguinary drama should advance, not decrease, in interest ; and, accordingly, the execution

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of Olinthus the Christian, reserved for the last. It was arranged that the two horsemen should first occupy the arena; that the foot gladiators, paired off, should then be loosed indiscriminately on the stage; that Calixenes and the lion should next perform their part in the bloody spectacle; and the tiger and the Nazarene be the grand finale. And, in the spectacles of Pompeii, the reader of Roman history must limit his imagination, nor expect to find those vast and wholesale exhibitions of magnificent slaughter with which a Nero or a Caligula regaled the inhabitants of the Imperial City. The Roman shows, which absorbed the more celebrated gladiators, and the chief proportion of foreign beasts, were indeed the very reason why, in the lesser towns

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of the empire, the sports of the amphitheatre were comparatively humane and rare; and in this, as in other respects, Pompeii was but the miniature, the microcosm of Rome. Still, it was an awful and imposing spectacle, with which modern times have, happily, nothing to compare; — a vast theatre, rising row upon row, and swarming with human beings, from fifteen to eighteen thousand in number, intent upon no fictitious representation, — no tragedy of the stage, — but the actual victory or defeat, the exultant life or the bloody death, of each and all who entered the arena!

The two horsemen were now at either extremity of the lists (if so they might be called); and at a given signal from Pansa, the combatants started

simultaneously as in full collision, each advancing his round buckler, each poising on high his light yet sturdy javelin ; but just when within three paces of his opponent, the steed of Berbix suddenly halted, wheeled around, and, as Nobilior was borne rapidly by, his antagonist spurred upon him. The buckler of Nobilior, quickly and skilfully extended, received a blow which otherwise would have been fatal.

“ Well done, Nobilior ! ” cried the prætor, giving the first vent to the popular excitement.

“ Bravely struck, my Berbix ! ” answered Clodius, from his seat.

And the wild murmur, swelled by many a shout, echoed from side to side.

The visors of both the horsemen were completely closed (like those of

the knights in after times), but the head was, nevertheless, the great point of assault; and Nobilior, now wheeling his charger with no less adroitness than his opponent, directed his spear full on the helmet of his foe. Berbix raised his buckler to shield himself, and his quick-eyed antagonist, suddenly lowering his weapon, pierced him through the breast. Berbix reeled and fell.

“Nobilior! Nobilior!” shouted the populace.

“I have lost ten sestertia,”¹ said Clodius, between his teeth.

“*Habet!* — he has it,” said Pansa, deliberately.

The populace, not yet hardened into cruelty, made the signal of mercy; but

¹ A little more than £80.

as the attendants of the arena approached, they found the kindness came too late;—the heart of the Gaul had been pierced, and his eyes were set in death. It was his life's blood that flowed so darkly over the sand and sawdust of the arena.

“It is a pity it was so soon over—there was little enough for one's trouble,” said the widow Fulvia.

“Yes—I have no compassion for Berbix. Any one might have seen that Nobilior did but feint. Mark, they fix the fatal hook to the body—they drag him away to the spoliarium—they scatter new sand over the stage! Pansa regrets nothing more than that he is not rich enough to strew the arena with borax, and cinnabar, as Nero used to do.”



“ Well, if it has been a brief battle, it is quickly succeeded. See my handsome Lydon on the arena — ay, and the net-bearer too, and the swordsmen ! Oh, charming ! ”

There were now on the arena six combatants : Niger and his net, matched against Sporus with his shield and his short broadsword ; Lydon and Tetraides, naked save by a cincture around the waist, each armed only with a heavy Greek cestus ; and two gladiators from Rome, clad in complete steel, and evenly matched with immense bucklers and pointed swords.

The initiatory contest between Lydon and Tetraides being less deadly than that between the other combatants, no sooner had they advanced to

the middle of the arena than, as by common consent, the rest held back, to see how that contest should be decided, and wait till fiercer weapons might replace the cestus, ere they themselves commenced hostilities. They stood leaning on their arms and apart from each other, gazing on the show, which, if not bloody enough thoroughly to please the populace, they were still inclined to admire, because its origin was of their ancestral Greece.

No persons could, at first glance, have seemed less evenly matched than the two antagonists. Tetraides, though not taller than Lydon, weighed considerably more; the natural size of his muscles was increased, to the eyes of the vulgar, by masses of solid flesh;

for, as it was a notion that the contest of the cestus fared easiest with him who was plumpest, Tetraides had encouraged to the utmost his hereditary predisposition to the portly. His shoulders were vast, and his lower limbs thick-set, double-jointed, and slightly curved outward, in that formation which takes so much from beauty to give so largely to strength. But Lydon, except that he was slender even almost to meagreness, was beautifully and delicately proportioned; and the skilful might have perceived that, with much less compass of muscle than his foe, that which he had was more seasoned — iron and compact. In proportion, too, as he wanted flesh, he was likely to possess activity; and a haughty smile on his resolute face,

which strongly contrasted the solid heaviness of his enemy's, gave assurance to those who beheld it, and united their hope to their pity ; so that, despite the disparity of their seeming strength, the cry of the multitude was nearly as loud for Lydon as for Tetraides.

Whoever is acquainted with the modern prize-ring — whoever has witnessed the heavy and disabling strokes which the human fist, skilfully directed, hath the power to bestow — may easily understand how much that happy facility would be increased by a band carried by thongs of leather around the arm as high as the elbow, and terribly strengthened about the knuckles by a plate of iron, and sometimes a plunket of lead. Yet this, which was meant

to increase, perhaps rather diminished the interest of the fray: for it necessarily shortened its duration. A very few blows, successfully and scientifically *planted*, might suffice to bring the contest to a close; and the battle did not, therefore, often allow full scope for the energy, fortitude, and dogged perseverance, that we technically style *pluck*, which not unusually wins the day against superior science, and which heightens to so painful a delight the interest in the battle and the sympathy for the brave.

“Guard thyself!” growled Tetraides, moving nearer and nearer to his foe, who rather shifted around him than receded.

Lydon did not answer, save by a scornful glance of his quick, vigilant

eye. Tetraides struck — it was as the blow of a smith on a vice; Lydon sank suddenly on one knee — the blow passed over his head. Not so harmless was Lydon's retaliation: he quickly sprang to his feet, and aimed his cestus full on the broad breast of his antagonist. Tetraides reeled — the populace shouted.

“ You are unlucky to-day,” said Lepidus to Clodius: “ you have lost one bet — you will lose another.”

“ By the gods! my bronzes go to the auctioneer if that is the case. I have no less than a hundred sestertia¹ upon Tetraides. Ha, ha! see how he rallies! That was a home stroke: he has cut open Lydon's shoulder. — A Tetraides! — a Tetraides! ”

¹ Above £800.

“But Lydon is not disheartened. By Pollux! how well he keeps his temper! See how dexterously he avoids those hammer-like hands! — dodging now here, now there — circling round and round. Ah, poor Lydon! he has it again.”

“Three to one still on Tetraides! What say you, Lepidus?”

“Well — nine sestertia to three — be it so! What! again, Lydon. He stops — he gasps for breath. By the gods, he is down! No — he is again on his legs. Brave Lydon! Tetraides is encouraged — he laughs loud — he rushes on him.”

“Fool — success blinds him — he should be cautious. Lydon’s eye is like a lynx’s!” said Clodius, between his teeth.

“ Ha, Clodius ! saw you that ? Your man totters ! Another blow — he falls — he falls ! ”

“ Earth revives him then. He is once more up ; but the blood rolls down his face.”

“ By the thunderer ! Lydon wins it. See how he presses on him ! That blow on the temple would have crushed an ox ! it *has* crushed Tetraides. He falls again — he cannot move — *habet !* — *habet !* ”

“ *Habet !* ” repeated Pansa. “ Take them out and give them the armour and swords.”

“ Noble editor,” said the officers, “ we fear that Tetraides will not recover in time ; howbeit, we will try.”

“ Do so.”

In a few minutes the officers, who

had dragged off the stunned and insensible gladiator, returned with rueful countenances. They feared for his life ; he was utterly incapacitated from reëntering the arena.

“In that case,” said Pansa, “hold Lydon a *subditius* ; and the first gladiator that is vanquished, let Lydon supply his place with the victor.”

The people shouted their applause at this sentence ; then they again sunk into deep silence. The trumpet sounded loudly. The four combatants stood each against each in prepared and stern array.

“Dost thou recognise the Romans, my Clodius ; are they among the celebrated, or are they merely *ordinarii*? ”

“Eumolpus is a good second-rate swordsman, my Lepidus. Nepimus,

the lesser man, I have never seen before ; but he is the son of one of the imperial fiscales,¹ and brought up in a proper school ; doubtless they will show sport, but I have no heart for the game ; I cannot win back my money — I am undone. Curses on that Lydon ! who could have supposed he was so dexterous or so lucky ? ”

“ Well, Clodius, shall I take compassion on you, and accept your own terms with these Romans ? ”

“ An even ten sestertia on Eumolpus, then ? ”

“ What ! when Nepimus is untried ! Nay, nay ; that is too bad.”

“ Well — ten to eight ? ”

“ Agreed.”

While the contest in the amphithe-

¹ Gladiators maintained by the emperor.

atre had thus commenced, there was one in the loftier benches for whom it had assumed, indeed, a poignant — a stifling interest. The aged father of Lydon, despite his Christian horror of the spectacle, in his agonised anxiety for his son, had not been able to resist being the spectator of his fate. One amid a fierce crowd of strangers — the lowest rabble of the populace — the old man saw, felt nothing, but the form — the presence of his brave son ! Not a sound had escaped his lips when twice he had seen him fall to the earth ; — only he had turned paler, and his limbs trembled. But he had uttered one low cry when he saw him victorious ; unconscious, alas ! of the more fearful battle to which that victory was but a prelude.

“My gallant boy!” said he, and wiped his eyes.

“Is he thy son?” said a brawny fellow to the right of the Nazarene; “he has fought well: let us see how he does by and by. Hark! he is to fight the first victor. Now, old boy, pray the gods that that victor be neither of the Romans! nor, next to them, the giant Niger.”

The old man sat down again and covered his face. The fray for the moment was indifferent to him — Lydon was not one of the combatants. Yet — yet — the thought flushed across him — the fray was indeed of deadly interest — the first who fell was to make way for Lydon! He started, and bent down, with straining eyes and clasped hands, to view the encounter.

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The first interest was attracted toward the combat of Niger with Sporus; for this species of contest, from the fatal result which usually attended it, and from the great science it required in either antagonist, was always peculiarly inviting to the spectators.

They stood at a considerable distance from each other. The singular helmet which Sporus wore (the visor of which was down) concealed his face; but the features of Niger attracted a fearful and universal interest from their compressed and vigilant ferocity. Thus they stood for some moments, each eyeing each, until Sporus began slowly, and with great caution, to advance, holding his sword pointed, like a modern fencer's, at the breast of his foe. Niger retreated as

his antagonist advanced, gathering up his net with his right hand, and never taking his small glittering eye from the movements of the swordsman. Suddenly, when Sporus had approached nearly at arm's length, the retiarius threw himself forward, and cast his net. A quick inflection of body saved the gladiator from the deadly snare! he uttered a sharp cry of joy and rage, and rushed upon Niger: but Niger had already drawn in his net, thrown it across his shoulders, and now fled around the lists with a swiftness which the *secutor*¹ in vain endeavoured to equal. The people laughed

¹ So called, from the office of that tribe of gladiators, in *following* the foe the moment the net was cast, in order to smite him ere he could have time to rearrange it.

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and shouted aloud, to see the ineffectual efforts of the broad-shouldered gladiator to overtake the flying giant: when, at that moment, their attention was turned from these to the two Roman combatants.

They had placed themselves at the onset face to face, at the distance of modern fencers from each other; but the extreme caution which both evinced at first had prevented any warmth of engagement, and allowed the spectators full leisure to interest themselves in the battle between Sporus and his foe. But the Romans were now heated into full and fierce encounter; they pushed — returned — advanced on — retreated from — each other with all that careful yet scarcely perceptible caution which characterises men well

experienced and equally matched. But at this moment, Eumolpus, the elder gladiator, by that dexterous back-stroke which was considered in the arena so difficult to avoid, had wounded Nepimus in the side. The people shouted ; Lepidus turned pale.

“ Ho ! ” said Clodius, “ the game is nearly over. If Eumolpus fights now the quiet fight, the other will gradually bleed himself away.”

“ But, thank the gods ! he does *not* fight the backward fight. See ! — he presses hard upon Nepimus. By Mars ! but Nepimus had him there ! the helmet rang again ! — Clodius, I shall win ! ”

“ Why do I ever bet but at the dice ? ” groaned Clodius to himself ; — “ or why cannot one cog a gladiator ? ”

“A Sporus! — a Sporus!” shouted the populace, as Niger, now having suddenly paused, had again cast his net, and again unsuccessfully. He had not retreated this time with sufficient agility — the sword of Sporus had inflicted a severe wound upon his right leg; and, incapacitated to fly, he was pressed hard by the fierce swordsman. His great height and length of arm still continued, however, to give him no despicable advantages; and steadily keeping his trident at the front of his foe, he repelled him successfully for several minutes. Sporus now tried, by great rapidity of evolution, to get around his antagonist, who necessarily moved with pain and slowness. In so doing, he lost his caution — he advanced too near to the

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giant — raised his arm to strike, and received the three points of the fatal spear full in his breast! He sank on his knee. In a moment more, the deadly net was cast over him,—he struggled against its meshes in vain; again — again — again he writhed mutely beneath the fresh strokes of the trident — his blood flowed fast through the net and redly over the sand. He lowered his arms in acknowledgment of defeat.

The conquering retiarius withdrew his net, and, leaning on his spear, looked to the audience for their judgment. Slowly, too, at the same moment, the vanquished gladiator rolled his dim and despairing eyes around the theatre. From row to row, from bench to bench, there glared upon

him but merciless and unpitying eyes.

Hushed was the roar — the murmur ! The silence was dread, for in it was no sympathy ; not a hand — no, not even a woman's hand — gave the signal of charity and life ! Sporus had never been popular in the arena ; and, lately, the interest of the combat had been excited on behalf of the wounded Niger. The people were warmed into blood — the *mimic* fight had ceased to charm ; the interest had mounted up to the desire of sacrifice and the thirst of death !

The gladiator felt that his doom was sealed ; he uttered no prayer — no groan. The people gave the signal of death ! In dogged but agonised submission, he bent his neck to re-

ceive the fatal stroke. And now, as the spear of the retiarius was not a weapon to inflict instant and certain death, there stalked into the arena a grim and fatal form, brandishing a short, sharp sword, and with features utterly concealed beneath its visor. With slow and measured steps, this dismal headsman approached the gladiator, still kneeling — laid the left hand on his humbled crest — drew the edge of the blade across his neck — turned around to the assembly, lest, in the last moment, remorse should come upon them; the dread signal continued the same: the blade glittered brightly in the air — fell — and the gladiator rolled upon the sand; his limbs quivered — were still, — he was a corpse.

His body was dragged at once from the arena through the gate of death, and thrown into the gloomy den termed technically the spoliarium. And ere it had well reached that destination, the strife between the remaining combatants was decided. The sword of Eumolpus had inflicted the death-wound upon the less experienced combatant. A new victim was added to the receptacle of the slain.

Throughout that mighty assembly there now ran a universal movement; the people breathed more freely, and resettled themselves in their seats. A grateful shower was cast over every row from the concealed conduits. In cool and luxurious pleasure they talked over the late spectacle of blood. Eumolpus removed his helmet, and wiped

his brows; his close-curled hair and short beard, his noble Roman features and bright dark eye, attracted the general admiration. He was fresh, unwounded, unfatigued.

The editor paused, and proclaimed aloud that, as Niger's wound disabled him from again entering the arena, Lydon was to be the successor to the slaughtered Nepimus, and the new combatant of Eumolpus.

“ Yet, Lydon,” added he, “ if thou wouldst decline the combat with one so brave and tried, thou mayst have full liberty to do so. Eumolpus is not the antagonist that was originally decreed for thee. Thou knowest best how far thou canst cope with him. If thou failest, thy doom is honourable death; if thou conquerest, out of my

own purse I will double the stipulated prize.”

The people shouted applause. Lydon stood in the lists, he gazed around ; high above he beheld the pale face, the straining eyes, of his father. He turned away irresolute for a moment. No ! the conquest of the cestus was not sufficient — he had not yet won the prize of victory — his father was still a slave !

“ Noble ædile ! ” he replied, in a firm and deep tone, “ I shrink not from this combat. For the honour of Pompeii, I demand that one trained by its long celebrated lanista shall do battle with this Roman.”

The people shouted louder than before.

“ Four to one against Lydon ! ” said Clodius to Lepidus.

“I would not take twenty to one! Why, Eumolpus is a very Achilles, and this poor fellow is but a *tyro*!”

Eumolpus gazed hard on the face of Lydon; he smiled; yet the smile was followed by a slight and scarce audible sigh—a touch of compassionate emotion, which custom conquered the moment the heart acknowledged it.

And now both, clad in complete armour, the sword drawn, the visor closed, the two last combatants of the arena (ere man, at least, was matched with beast), stood opposed to each other.

It was just at this time that a letter was delivered to the prætor by one of the attendants of the arena; he removed the cincture—glanced over

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it for a moment — his countenance betrayed surprise and embarrassment. He reread the letter and then, muttering, — “ Tush ! it is impossible ! — the man must be drunk, even in the morning, to dream of such follies ! ” — threw it carelessly aside, and gravely settled himself once more in the attitude of attention to the sports.

The interest of the public was wound up very high. Eumolpus had at first won their favour ; but the gallantry of Lydon, and his well-timed allusion to the honour of the Pompeian lanista, had afterward given the latter the preference in their eyes.

“ Holla, old fellow ! ” said Medon’s neighbour to him. “ Your son is hardly matched ; but never fear, the editor will not permit him to be slain — no, nor

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the people neither; he has behaved too bravely for that. Ha! that was a home thrust! — well averted, by Pollux! At him again, Lydon! — they stop to breathe! What art thou muttering, old boy?"

"Prayers!" answered Medon, with a more calm and hopeful mien than he had yet maintained.

"Prayers! — trifles! The time for gods to carry a man away in a cloud is gone now. Ha, Jupiter! — what a blow! Thy side — thy side! — take care of thy side, Lydon!"

There was a convulsive tremour throughout the assembly. A fierce blow from Eumolpus, full on the crest, had brought Lydon to his knee.

"*Habet!* — he has it!" cried a shrill female voice; "he has it!"

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It was the voice of the girl who had so anxiously anticipated the sacrifice of some criminal to the beasts.

“Be silent, child!” said the wife of Pansa, haughtily. “*Non habet!* — he is *not* wounded!”

“I wish he were, if only to spite old surly Medon,” muttered the girl.

Meanwhile Lydon, who had hitherto defended himself with great skill and valour, began to give way before the vigorous assaults of the practised Roman; his arm grew tired, his eye dizzy, he breathed hard and painfully. The combatants paused again for breath.

“Young man,” said Eumolpus, in a low voice, “desist; I will wound thee slightly — then lower thy arm; thou hast propitiated the editor and

the mob — thou wilt be honourably saved ! ”

“ And my father still enslaved ! ” groaned Lydon, to himself. “ No ! death or his freedom.”

At that thought, and seeing that, his strength not being equal to the endurance of the Roman, everything depended on a sudden and desperate effort, he threw himself fiercely on Eumolpus ; the Roman warily retreated — Lydon thrust again — Eumolpus drew himself aside — the sword grazed his cuirass — Lydon’s breast was exposed — the Roman plunged his sword through the joints of his armour, not meaning, however, to inflict a deep wound ; Lydon, weak and exhausted, fell forward, fell right on the point : it passed through and through, even

to the back. Eumolpus drew forth his blade; Lydon still made an effort to regain his balance — his sword left his grasp — he struck mechanically at the gladiator with his naked hand, and fell prostrate on the arena. With one accord, editor and assembly made the signal of mercy — the officers of the arena approached — they took off the helmet of the vanquished. He still breathed; his eyes rolled fiercely on his foe; the savageness he had acquired in his calling glared from his gaze and lowered upon the brow darkened already with the shades of death; then, with a convulsive groan, with a half-start, he lifted his eyes above. They rested not on the face of the editor nor on the pitying brows of his relenting judges. He saw them

not ; they were as if the vast space was desolate and bare ; one pale agonising face alone was all he recognised — one cry of a broken heart was all that, amid the murmurs and shouts of the populace, reached his ear. The ferocity vanished from his brow : a soft, a tender expression of sanctifying but despairing filial love played over his features — played — waned — darkened ! His face suddenly became locked and rigid, resuming its former fierceness. He fell upon the earth.

“ Look to him,” said the ædile ; “ he has done his duty ! ”

The officers dragged him off to the spoliarium.

“ A true type of glory and of its fate ! ” murmured Arbaces to himself ; and his eye, glancing around the

amphitheatre, betrayed so much of disdain and scorn, that whoever encountered it felt his breath suddenly arrested, and his emotions frozen into one sensation of abasement and awe.

Again rich perfumes were wafted around the theatre; the attendants sprinkled fresh sand over the arena.

“Bring forth the lion and Olinthus the Christian,” said the editor.

And a deep and breathless hush of overwrought interest, and intense (yet, strange to say, not unpleasing) terror lay, like a mighty and awful dream, over the assembly.

III.

OLINTHUS the Christian and a Macedonian gladiator had been placed together in that gloomy and narrow cell in which the criminals of the arena waited their last and fearful struggle. Their eyes, of late accustomed to the darkness, scanned the faces of each other in this awful hour, and by that dim light the pallor, which chased away the natural hues from either cheek, assumed a yet more ashy and ghastly whiteness. Yet their brows were erect and dauntless — their limbs did not tremble — their lips were compressed and rigid. The religion of the one, the pride of the other, the conscious innocence of both, and

it may be the support derived from their mutual companionship, elevated the victim into the hero.

“Hark! hearest thou that shout? They are growling over their human blood,” said Olinthus.

“I hear; my heart grows sick; but the gods support me.”

“The gods! O rash young man! in this hour recognise only the One God. Have I not taught thee in the dungeon, wept for thee, prayed for thee? — in my zeal and in my agony, have I not thought more of thy salvation than my own?”

“Brave friend!” answered the Macedonian, solemnly, “I have listened to thee with awe, with wonder, and with a secret tendency toward conviction. Had our lives been spared,

I might gradually have weaned myself from the tenets of my own faith, and inclined to thine ; but, in this last hour, it were a craven thing and a base, to yield to hasty terror what should only be the result of lengthened meditation. Were I to embrace thy creed, and cast down my father's gods, should I not be bribed by thy promise of heaven, or awed by thy threats of hell ? Olinthus, no. Think we of each other with equal charity — I honouring thy sincerity — thou pitying my blindness or my obdurate courage. As have been my deeds, such will be my reward ; and the Power of Powers above will not judge harshly of human error, when it is linked with honesty of purpose and truth of heart. Speak we no more of this. Hush ! Dost thou

hear them drag yon heavy body through the passage? Such as that clay will be ours soon."

"O Heaven! O Christ! already I behold ye!" cried the fervent Olinthus, lifting up his hands; "I tremble not — I rejoice that the prison-house shall be soon broken."

The gladiator bowed his head in silence. He felt the distinction between his fortitude and that of his fellow-sufferer. The heathen did not tremble; but the Christian exulted.

The door swung gratingly back — the gleam of spears shot along the walls.

"Calixenes the Macedonian, thy time has come," said a loud and clear voice; "the lion awaits thee."

"I am ready," said the Macedonian.

“ Brother and co-mate, one last embrace! Bless me — and, farewell !”

The Christian opened his arms — he clasped the young heathen to his breast — he kissed his forehead and cheek — he sobbed aloud — his tears flowed fast and hot over the features of his new friend.

“ Oh ! could I have converted thee, I had not wept. Oh ! that I might say to thee, ‘ We two shall sup this night in Paradise ! ’ ”

“ It may be so yet,” answered the Macedonian, with a tremulous voice. “ They whom death parts now, may yet meet beyond the grave: on the earth — on the beautiful, the beloved earth, farewell for ever ! — Worthy officer, I attend you.”

Calixenes tore himself away; and

when he came forth into the air, its breath, which, though sunless, was hot and arid, smote witheringly upon him. His frame, not yet restored from the effects of the deadly draught, shrank and trembled. The officers supported him.

“Courage!” said one; “thou art young, active, well knit. They give thee a weapon! despair not, and thou mayst yet conquer.”

Calixenes did not reply; but, ashamed of his infirmity, he made a desperate and convulsive effort, and regained the firmness of his nerves. They anointed his body, completely naked save by a cincture around the loins, placed the *stilus* (vain weapon!) in his hand, and led him into the arena.

And now when the Macedonian saw the eyes of thousands and tens of thousands upon him, he no longer felt that he was mortal. All evidence of fear — all fear itself — was gone. A red and haughty flush spread over the paleness of his features — he towered aloft to the full of his glorious stature. In the elastic beauty of his limbs and form, in his intent but unfrowning brow, in the high disdain, and in the indomitable soul, which breathed visibly, which spoke audibly, from his attitude, his lip, his eye, — he seemed the very incarnation, vivid and corporeal, of the valour of his land — of the divinity of its worship — at once a hero and a god!

“ By Venus, how warm it is ! ” said Fulvia ; “ yet there is no sun. Would

that those stupid sailors¹ could have fastened up that gap in the awning!"

"Oh, it is warm, indeed. I turn sick—I faint!" said the wife of Pansa; even her experienced stoicism giving way at the struggle about to take place.

The lion had been kept without food for twenty-four hours, and the animal had, during the whole morning, testified a singular and restless uneasiness, which the keeper had attributed to the pangs of hunger. Yet its bearing seemed rather that of fear than of rage; its roar was painful and distressed; it hung its head—snuffed the air through the bars—then lay down—started again—and again

¹ Sailors were generally employed in fastening the velaria of the amphitheatre.

uttered its wild and far-resounding cries. And now, in its den, it lay utterly dumb and mute, with distended nostrils forced hard against the grating, and disturbing, with a heaving breath, the sand below on the arena.

The editor's lip quivered, and his cheek grew pale; he looked anxiously around — hesitated — delayed; the crowd became impatient. Slowly he gave the sign; the keeper, who was behind the den, cautiously removed the grating, and the lion leaped forth with a mighty and glad roar of release. The keeper hastily retreated through the grated passage leading from the arena, and left the lord of the forest — and his prey.

Calixenes had bent his limbs so as to give himself the firmest posture at

the expected rush of the lion, with his small and shining weapon raised on high, in the faint hope that *one* well-directed thrust (for he knew that he should have time but for *one*) might penetrate through the eye to the brain of his grim foe.

But, to the unutterable astonishment of all, the beast seemed not even aware of the presence of the criminal.

At the first moment of its release it halted abruptly in the arena, raised itself half on end, snuffing the upward air with impatient sighs; then suddenly it sprang forward, but not on the Macedonian. At half-speed it circled around and around the space, turning its vast head from side to side with an anxious and perturbed gaze, as if seeking only some avenue of escape; once or twice

it endeavoured to leap up the parapet that divided it from the audience, and, on falling, uttered rather a baffled howl than its deep-toned and kingly roar. It evinced no sign, either of wrath or hunger; its tail drooped along the sand, instead of lashing its gaunt sides; and its eye, though it wandered at times to Calixenes, rolled again listlessly from him. At length, as if tired of attempting to escape, it crept with a moan into its cage, and once more laid itself down to rest.

The first surprise of the assembly at the apathy of the lion soon grew converted into resentment at its cowardice; and the populace already merged their pity for the fate of Calixenes into angry compassion for their own disappointment.

The editor called to the keeper.

“ How is this? Take the goad, prick him forth, and then close the door of the den.”

As the keeper, with some fear but more astonishment, was preparing to obey, a loud cry was heard from one of the booths of the arena; there was a confusion, a bustle — voices of remonstrance suddenly breaking forth, and suddenly silenced at the reply. All eyes turned, in wonder at the interruption, toward the quarter of the disturbance, and beheld Arbaces the Egyptian rise from his seat.

He stretched his hand on high; over his lofty brow and royal features there came an expression of unutterable solemnity and command.

“ Behold!” he shouted, with a voice

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of thunder, which stilled the roar of the crowd ; “ behold how the gods protect the weak ! The fires of the avenging Orcus burst forth against this cruel throng ! ”

The eyes of the crowd followed the gesture of the Egyptian, and beheld, with ineffable dismay, a vast vapour shooting from the summit of Vesuvius, in the form of a gigantic pine-tree ; the trunk, blackness, — the branches, fire ! — a fire that shifted and wavered in its hues with every moment, now fiercely luminous, now of a dull and dying red, that again blazed terrifically forth with intolerable glare !

There was a dead, heart-sunken silence — through which there suddenly broke the roar of the lion, which was echoed back from within

the building by the sharper and fiercer yells of its fellow beast. Dread seers were they of the Burden of the Atmosphere, and wild prophets of the wrath to come!

Then there arose on high the universal shrieks of women; the men stared at each other, but were dumb. At that moment they felt the earth shake beneath their feet; the walls of the theatre trembled; and beyond, in the distance, they heard the crash of falling roofs; an instant more and the mountain-cloud seemed to roll toward them, dark and rapid, like a torrent; at the same time, it cast forth from its bosom a shower of ashes mixed with vast fragments of burning stone! Over the crushing vines,—over the desolate streets,—over the amphitheatre itself,

— far and wide, — with many a mighty splash in the agitated sea, — fell that awful shower !

No longer thought the crowd of Calixenes or of Olinthus ; safety for themselves was their sole thought. Each turned to fly — each dashing, pressing, crushing, against the other. Trampling recklessly over the fallen, — amid groans, and oaths, and prayers, and sudden shrieks, the enormous crowd vomited itself forth through the numerous passages. Whither should they fly ? Some, anticipating a second earthquake, hastened to their homes to load themselves with their most costly goods, and escape while it was yet time ; others, dreading the showers of ashes that now fell fast, torrent upon torrent, over the streets,

rushed under the roofs of the nearest houses, or temples, or sheds — shelter of any kind — for protection from the terrors of the open air. But darker, and larger, and mightier, spread the cloud above them. It was a sudden and more ghastly Night rushing upon the realm of Noon !

IV.

“ **T**HE mountain ! the earthquake ! ” resounded from side to side. The officers fled with the rest ; they left Olinthus and others to save themselves as they might.

As the sense of the dangers around them flashed on the Macedonian, his generous heart recurred to Olinthus. He, too, was reprieved from the tiger

by the hand of the gods ; should he be left to a no less fatal death in the neighbouring cell ? Calixenes hurried across the passages ; he gained the den of the Christian. He found Olinthus kneeling and in prayer.

“ Arise ! arise ! my friend,” he cried. “ Save thyself, and fly ! See ; Nature is thy dread deliverer ! ” He led forth the bewildered Christian, and pointed to a cloud which advanced darker and darker, disgorging forth showers of ashes and pumice-stones ; — and bade him hearken to the cries and trampling rush of the scattered crowd.

“ This is the hand of God — God be praised ! ” said Olinthus, devoutly.

“ Fly ! seek thy brethren ! Concert with them thy escape. Farewell ! ”

Olinthus did not answer, neither did

he mark the retreating form of his friend. High thoughts and solemn absorbed his soul ; and in the enthusiasm of his kindling heart he exulted in the mercy of God rather than trembled at the evidence of his power.

At length he roused himself, and hurried on, he scarce knew whither.

The open doors of a dark, desolate cell suddenly appeared on his path ; through the gloom within there flared and flickered a single lamp ; and by its light he saw three grim and naked forms stretched on the earth in death. His feet were suddenly arrested : for, amid the terrors of that drear recess, — the spoliarium of the arena, — he heard a low voice calling on the name of Christ !

He could not resist lingering at that

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appeal ; he entered the den, and his feet were dabbled in the slow streams of blood that gushed from the corpses over the sand.

“Who,” said the Nazarene, “calls upon the Son of God ?”

No answer came forth ; and turning around, Olinthus beheld, by the light of the lamp, an old, gray-headed man sitting on the floor, and supporting in his lap the head of one of the dead. The features of the dead man were firmly and rigidly locked in the last sleep ; but over the lip there played a fierce smile — not the Christian’s smile of hope, but the dark sneer of hatred and defiance.

Yet on the face still lingered the beautiful roundness of early youth. The hair curled thick and glossy over

the unwrinkled brow ; and the down of manhood but slightly shaded the marble of the hueless cheek. And over this face bent one of such unutterable sadness — of such yearning tenderness — of such fond, and such deep despair ! The tears of the old man fell fast and hot, but he did not feel them ; and when his lips moved, and he mechanically uttered the prayer of his benign and hopeful faith, neither his heart nor his sense responded to the words : it was but the involuntary emotion that broke from the lethargy of his mind. His boy was dead, and had died for him ! — and the old man's heart was broken !

“ Medon ! ” said Olinthus, pityingly, “ arise and fly ! God is forth upon the wings of the elements ! The New

Gomorrah is doomed! — Fly, ere the fires consume thee! ”

“ He was ever so full of life! — he *cannot* be dead! Come hither! — place your hand on his heart! — sure it beats yet? ”

“ Brother, the soul has fled! we will remember it in our prayers! Thou canst not reanimate the dumb clay! Come, come, — hark! while I speak, yon crashing walls! — hark! yon agonising cries! Not a moment is to be lost! — Come! ”

“ I hear nothing! ” said Medon, shaking his gray hair. “ The poor boy, his love murdered him! ”

“ Come! come! forgive this friendly force.”

“ What! Who would sever the father from the son? ” And Medon

clasped the body tightly in his embrace, and covered it with passionate kisses. “Go!” said he, lifting up his face for one moment. “Go! — we must be alone!”

“Alas!” said the compassionate Nazarene. “Death has severed ye already!”

The old man smiled very calmly. “No, no, no!” he muttered, his voice growing lower with each word, — “Death has been more kind!”

With that his head drooped on his son’s breast — his arms relaxed their grasp. Olinthus caught him by the hand — the pulse had ceased to beat! The last words of the father were the words of truth, — *Death had been more kind!*

Meanwhile, the streets were already

thinned ; the crowd had hastened to disperse itself under shelter ; the ashes began to fill up the lower parts of the town ; but, here and there, you heard the steps of fugitives cranching them warily, or saw their pale and haggard faces by the blue glare of the lightning, or the more unsteady glare of torches, by which they endeavoured to steer their steps. But ever and anon the boiling water, or the straggling ashes, mysterious and gusty winds, rising and dying in a breath, extinguished these wandering lights, and with them the last living hope of those who bore them.

In the street that leads to the gate of Herculaneum, Clodius now bent his perplexed and doubtful way. “ If I can gain the open country,” thought he, “ doubtless there will be various

vehicles beyond the gate, and Herculaneum is not far distant. Thank Mercury ! I have little to lose, and that little is about me ! ”

“ Holla ! — help there — help ! ” cried a querulous and frightened voice. “ I have fallen down — my torch has gone out — my slaves have deserted me. I am Diomed — the rich Diomed ; — ten thousand sesterces to him who helps me ! ”

At the same moment, Clodius felt himself caught by the feet. “ Ill fortune to thee, — let me go, fool ! ” said the gambler.

“ Oh, help me up ! — give me thy hand ! ”

“ There — rise ! ”

“ Is this Clodius ? I know the voice ! Whither flyest thou ? ”

“Toward Herculaneum.”

“Blessed be the gods! our way is the same, then, as far as the gate. Why not take refuge in my villa? Thou knowest the long range of subterranean cellars beneath the basement, — that shelter, what shower can penetrate?”

“You speak well,” said Clodius, musingly. “And by storing the cellar with food, we can remain there even some days, should these wondrous storms endure so long.”

“Oh, blessed be he who invented gates to a city!” cried Diomed. “See! — they have placed a light within yon arch: by that let us guide our steps.”

The air was now still for a few minutes: the lamp from the gate

streamed out far and clear: the fugitives hurried on — they gained the gate — they passed by the Roman sentry; the lightning flashed over his livid face and polished helmet, but his stern features were composed even in their awe! He remained erect and motionless at his post. That hour itself had not animated the machine of the ruthless majesty of Rome into the reasoning and self-acting man. There he stood, amid the crashing elements: he had not received the permission to desert his station and escape.¹

Diomed and his companion hurried on, when suddenly a female form rushed athwart their way. It was the girl whose ominous voice had been

¹ The skeletons of more than one sentry were found at their posts.

raised so often and so gladly in anticipation of “the merry show !”

“ Oh, Diomed ! ” she cried, “ shelter ! shelter ! See ! ” — pointing to an infant clasped to her breast — “ see this little one ! — it is mine ! — the child of shame ! I have never owned it till this hour. But *now* I remember I am a mother ! I have plucked it from the cradle of its nurse : *she* had fled ! Who could think of the babe in such an hour but she who bore it ? Save it ! save it ! ”

“ Curses on thy shrill voice ! Away, harlot ! ” muttered Clodius, between his ground teeth.

“ Nay, girl, ” said the more humane Diomed ; “ follow if thou wilt. This way — this way — to the vaults ! ”

They hurried on — they arrived at

the house of Diomed — they laughed aloud as they crossed the threshold, for they deemed the danger over.

Diomed ordered his slaves to carry down into the subterranean gallery before described, a profusion of food, and oil for lights; and there Julia, Clodius, the mother and her babe, the greater part of the slaves, and some frightened visitors and clients of the neighbourhood, sought their shelter.

V.

THE cloud, which had scattered so deep a murkiness over the day, had now settled into a solid and impenetrable mass. It resembled less even the thickest gloom of a night in the open air than the close and

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blind darkness of some narrow room. But in proportion as the blackness gathered, did the lightnings around Vesuvius increase in their vivid and scorching glare. Nor was their horrible beauty confined to the usual hues of fire; no rainbow ever rivalled their varying and prodigal dyes. Now brightly blue as the most azure depth of a southern sky — now of a livid and snake-like green, darting restlessly to and fro as the folds of an enormous serpent — now of a lurid and intolerable crimson, gushing forth through the columns of smoke, far and wide, and lighting up the whole city from arch to arch — then suddenly dying into a sickly paleness, like the ghost of their own life!

In the pauses of the showers, you

heard the rumbling of the earth beneath, and the groaning waves of the tortured sea ; or, lower still, and audible but to the watch of intensest fear, the grinding and hissing murmur of the escaping gases through the chasms of the distant mountain. Sometimes the cloud appeared to break from its solid mass, and, by the lightning, to assume quaint and vast mimicries of human or of monster shapes, striding across the gloom, hurtling one upon the other, and vanishing swiftly into the turbulent abyss of shade ; so that, to the eyes and fancies of the affrighted wanderers, the unsubstantial vapours were as the bodily forms of gigantic foes — the agents of terror and of death.

The ashes in many places were

already knee-deep ; and the boiling showers which came from the steaming breath of the volcano forced their way into the houses, bearing with them a strong and suffocating vapour. In some places, immense fragments of rock, hurled upon the house roofs, bore down along the streets masses of confused ruin, which yet more and more, with every hour, obstructed the way ; and as the day advanced, the motion of the earth was more sensibly felt — the footing seemed to slide and creep — nor could chariot or litter be kept steady, even on the most level ground.

Sometimes the huger stones, striking against each other as they fell, broke into countless fragments, emitting sparks of fire, which caught whatever was combustible within their

reach; and along the plains beyond the city the darkness was now terribly relieved; for several houses, and even vineyards, had been set in flames; and at various intervals the fires rose sullenly and fiercely against the solid gloom. To add to this partial relief of the darkness, the citizens had, here and there, in the more public places, such as the porticos of temples and the entrances to the forum, endeavoured to place rows of torches; but these rarely continued long; the showers and the winds extinguished them, and the sudden darkness into which their fitful light was converted had something in it doubly terrible and doubly impressive on the impotence of human hopes, the lesson of despair.

Frequently, by the momentary light

of these torches, parties of fugitives encountered each other, some hurrying toward the sea, others flying from the sea back to the land; for the ocean had retreated rapidly from the shore—an utter darkness lay over it, and, upon its groaning and tossing waves, the storm of cinders and rocks fell without the protection which the streets and roofs afforded to the land. Wild—haggard—ghastly with supernatural fears, these groups encountered each other, but without the leisure to speak, to consult, to advise; for the showers fell now frequently, though not continuously, extinguishing the lights, which showed to each band the death-like faces of the other, and hurrying all to seek refuge beneath the nearest shelter. The whole elements of civilisa-

tion were broken up. Even and anon, by the flickering lights, you saw the thief hastening by the most solemn authorities of the law, laden with, and fearfully chuckling over, the produce of his sudden gains. If, in the darkness, wife was separated from husband, or parent from child, vain was the hope of reunion. Each hurried blindly and confusedly on. Nothing in all the various and complicated machinery of social life was left save the primal law of self-preservation !

“ Who is there ? ” said the trembling and hollow voice of one near Calixenes. “ Yet, what matters ? — the crush of the ruined world forbids to us friends or foes.”

Calixenes looked in the direction of the voice. Through the darkness

glared forth two burning eyes,—the lightning flashed and lingered athwart the temple,—and Calixenes, with a shudder, perceived the lion to which he had been doomed crouched beneath the pillars; and, close beside it, unwitting of the vicinity, lay the giant form of him who had accosted him—the wounded gladiator, Niger.

That lightning had revealed to each other the form of beast and man; yet the instinct of both was quelled. Nay, the lion crept near and nearer to the gladiator as for companionship; and the gladiator did not recede or tremble. The revolution of Nature had dissolved her lighter terrors as well as her wonted ties.

While they were thus terribly protected, a group of men and women,

bearing torches, passed by the temple. They were of the congregation of the Nazarenes ; and a sublime and unearthly emotion had not, indeed, quelled their awe, but it had robbed awe of fear. They had long believed, according to the error of the early Christians, that the Last Day was at hand ; they imagined now that the Day had come.

“ Woe ! woe ! ” cried, in a shrill and piercing voice, the elder at their head. “ Behold ! the Lord descendeth to judgment ! He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men ! Woe ! woe ! ye strong and mighty ! Woe to ye of the fasces and the purple ! Woe to the idolater and the worshipper of the beast ! Woe to ye who pour forth the blood of saints, and gloat over the death-pangs of the

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sons of God ! Woe to the harlot of the sea ! — woe ! woe ! ”

And with a loud and deep chorus, the troop chanted forth along the wild horrors of the air, — “ Woe to the harlot of the sea ! — woe ! woe ! ”

The Nazarenes paced slowly on, their torches still flickering in the storm, their voices still raised in menace and solemn warning, till, lost amid the windings in the streets, the darkness of the atmosphere and the silence of death again fell over the scene.

There was one of the frequent pauses in the showers, and as Calixenes stood, hesitating, on the last step of the portico, an old man, with a bag in his right hand, and leaning upon a youth, tottered by. The youth bore a torch. Calixenes recognised the two

as father and son — miser and prodigal.

“ Father,” said the youth, “ if you cannot move more swiftly, I must leave you, or we *both* perish ! ”

“ Fly, boy, then, and leave thy sire ! ”

“ But I cannot fly to starve ; give me thy bag of gold ! ” And the youth snatched at it.

“ Wretch ! wouldst thou rob thy father ? ”

“ Ay ! who can tell the tale in this hour ? Miser, perish ! ”

The boy struck the old man to the ground, plucked the bag from his relaxing hand, and fled onward with a shrill yell.

VI.

THE sudden illumination, the bursts of the floods of lava, and the earthquake, which we have already described, chanced when Sallust and his party had just gained the direct path leading from the city to the port; and here they were arrested by an immense crowd, more than half the population of the city. They spread along the field without the walls, thousands upon thousands, uncertain whither to fly. The sea had retired far from the shore; and they who had fled to it had been so terrified by the agitation and preternatural shrinking of the element, the gasping forms of the uncouth sea things which the waves had left upon

the sand, and by the sound of the huge stones cast from the mountain into the deep, that they had returned again to the land, as presenting the less frightful aspect of the two. Thus the two streams of human beings, the one seaward, the other *from* the sea, had met together, feeling a sad comfort in numbers ; arrested in despair and doubt.

“ The world is to be destroyed by fire,” said an old man in long loose robes, a philosopher of the Stoic school: “ Stoic and Epicurean wisdom have alike agreed in this prediction ; and the hour is come ! ”

“ Yea ; the hour is come ! ” cried a loud voice, solemn but not fearful.

Those around turned in dismay. The voice came from above them. It was the voice of Olinthus, who, sur-

rounded by his Christian friends, stood upon an abrupt eminence on which the old Greek colonists had raised a temple to Apollo, now time-worn and half in ruin.

“The hour is come !”

The Christians repeated the cry. It was caught up — it was echoed from side to side — woman and man, childhood and old age repeated, not aloud, but in a smothered and dreary murmur :

“THE HOUR IS COME !”

At that moment, a wild yell burst through the air ; — and, thinking only of escape, whither it knew not, the terrible tiger of the desert leaped among the throng, and hurried through its parted streams. And so came the earthquake, — and so darkness once more fell over the earth !

And now new fugitives arrived. Grasping the treasures no longer destined for their lord, the slaves of Arbaces joined the throng.

After many pauses and incredible perseverance, they gained the sea, and joined a group, who, bolder than the rest, resolved to hazard any peril rather than continue in such a scene. In darkness they put forth to sea ; but, as they cleared the land and caught new aspects of the mountain, its channels of molten fire threw a partial redness over the waves.

The showers of dust and ashes, still borne aloft, fell into the wave, and scattered their snows over the deck. Far and wide, borne by the winds, those showers descended upon the remotest climes, startling even the

swarthy African; and whirled along the antique soil of Syria and of Egypt.

VII.

NEARLY seventeen centuries had rolled away when the City of Pompeii was disinterred from its silent tomb,¹ all vivid with undimmed hues; its walls fresh as if painted yesterday — not a hue faded on the rich mosaic of its floors — in its forum the half-finished columns as left by the workman's hand — in its gardens the sacrificial tripod — in its halls the chest of treasure — in its baths the strigil — in its theatres the counter of admission — in its saloons the furniture

¹ Destroyed A. D. 79; first discovered A. D. 1750.

of Pompeii *

and the lamp — in its triclinia the fragments of the last feast — in its cubicula the perfumes and the rouge of faded beauty — and everywhere the bones and skeletons of those who once moved the springs of that minute yet gorgeous machine of luxury and of life ! ¹

In the house of Diomed, in the sub-

¹ At present there have been about three hundred and fifty or four hundred skeletons discovered in Pompeii; but, as a great part of the city is yet to be disinterred, we can scarcely calculate the number of those who perished in the destruction. Still, however, we have every reason to conclude that they were very few in proportion to those who escaped. The ashes had been evidently cleared away from many of the houses, no doubt for the purpose of recovering whatever treasures had been left behind. The mansion of our friend Sallust is one of those thus revisited. The skeletons which, re-

※ The Destruction

into a sulphurous vapour; the inmates of the vaults had rushed to the door, to find it closed and blocked up by the scoria without, and, in their attempts to force it, had been suffocated with the atmosphere.

In the garden was found a skeleton with a key by its bony hand, and near it a bag of coins. This is believed to have been the master of the house — the unfortunate Diomed, who had probably sought to escape by the garden, and been destroyed either by the vapours or some fragment of stone. Beside some silver vases lay another skeleton, probably of a slave.

The houses of Sallust and of Pansa, the Temple of Isis, with the juggling concealments behind the statues, — the lurking-place of its holy oracles, — are

now bared to the gaze of the curious. In one of the chambers of that temple was found a huge skeleton with an axe beside it; two walls had been pierced by the axe — the victim could penetrate no farther. As the excavators cleared on through the mass of ruin, they found the skeleton of a man literally severed in two by a prostrate column; the skull was of so striking a conformation, so boldly marked in its intellectual, as well as its worse physical developments, that it has excited the constant speculation of every itinerant believer in the theories of Spurzheim, who has gazed upon that ruined palace of the mind. Still, after the lapse of ages, the traveller may survey that airy hall, within whose cunning galleries and elaborate chambers once

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※ The Destruction

thought, reasoned, dreamed, and sinned
the soul of Arbaces the Egyptian.

Viewing the various witnesses of a
social system which has passed from
the world for ever — a stranger, from
that remote and barbarian isle which
the imperial Roman shivered when he
named, paused amid the delights of the
soft Campania and composed this his-
tory !

THE END.

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